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CULTURE

Sand and city: Maltine Records co-founder Tomohiro Konuta, who's better known as just 'Tomad' in music circles, will showcase some of his netlabel's best acts at a pair of events this weekend.

MUSIC

Netlabel Maltine mulls a move to the majors

BY PATRICK ST. MICHEL

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Music runs online in 2016. Songs become smash hits via YouTube, while global superstars command attention by giving exclusives to streaming services. Looking back at a time when web-only artists were novel seems absurd now.

“Around 2010, I think the internet music scene really existed separate from the indie and major scenes,” says Tomohiro Konuta, founder of online imprint Maltine Records. “But now, lots of artists become big from Soundcloud or Bandcamp. In a way, everything is internet music. It isn’t really special anymore.”

Eleven years ago, the netlabel represented a real alternative to a music industry fixated on physical releases and pay-to-download singles. Konuta (better known by the nickname “Tomad”) founded the label with a friend, and its acts (tofubeats, Mikeneko Homeless) quickly developed a sizeable following eager to download their free MP3 releases — online, of course.

Internet-centric music might not be as unique today, but Maltine still stands at the forefront of new ideas. The hyperactive sound it championed has bled over to J-pop and major labels are now signing up Maltine artists.

Konuta will showcase what he has been up to on Oct. 8 with a pair of events held at Shibuya’s WWW and its newly opened sister spot WWW X. Respectively titled Daitokai (Megalopolis) and Sakyu (Sand Dune), the shows highlight the two dominant sounds Konuta thinks define Maltine at the moment. Daitokai leans pop, with chipper synth sounds courtesy of Tomggg, Parkgolf and London artist bo en, while Sakyu features a mix of house sets from Jun Kamoda and Cherryboy Function alongside experimental fare via Boredoms leader Eye and Los Angeles’ Meishi Smile.

Maltine’s most prominent names, though, moved from MP3 fame to major-label deals. Kobe producer tofubeats has released two albums with Warner Japan sub-label unBorde, while Osaka’s Avec Avec has become a go-to J-pop producer who has been recruited to mix Johnny & Associates boy bands. The latest act to make the jump from Maltine to mainstream is hyperactive trio Pa’s Lam System, who released its first major label single, “Twiststep,” via the Toy’s Factory label this August.

“I think it’s good when artists like tofubeats go to major labels,” Konuta says. “But I want to support them when this chance arrives, in a way allowing the artist to retain what makes them good.”

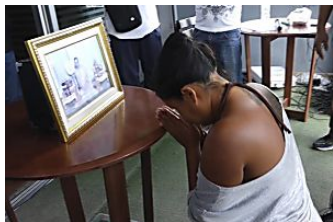
To that end, Konuta was recently hired as an A&R representative at Toy’s Factory, which could result in Maltine acts receiving broader exposure. He says the company plans to launch a sub-label that he will be in charge of in the near future.

Since netlabels are no longer a novelty, Konuta hopes to “redefine what Maltine is.”

“I don’t want to do the same thing over and over,” he says. “I always want be doing something new, even if it’s hard to know just what that is.”

Here’s hoping his pair of events helps him figure that out.

Daitokai and Sakyu take place at WWW and WWW X in Shibuya-ku, Tokyo, on Oct. 8 (3 p.m. start; ¥3,900 in advance; 03-5458-7688). For more information, visit [✉ maltinerecords.cs8.biz](http://maltinerecords.cs8.biz) (<http://maltinerecords.cs8.biz>).



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